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A BEGINNING READING PROGRAM FOR THE LINGUISTICALLY HANDICAPPED.

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MANY PUPILS ENTER FIRST GRADE EACH YEAR WHO ARE LINGUISTICALLY HANDICAPPED AND ARE UNABLE TO COPE WITH THE TRADITIONAL READING PROGRAMS WHICH HAVE BEEN DESIGNED FOR THE MIDDLE-CLASS ANGLO-SAXON STEREOTYPE. THESE MINORITY GROUP YOUNGSTERS FALL MAINLY INTO TWO MAJOR CATEGORIES. THE FIRST GROUP IS MADE UP OF NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHILDREN WHOSE SPEECH HABITS ARE NON-STANDARD, AND THE SECOND GROUP IS COMPOSED OF THOSE BILINGUALS FOR WHOM ENGLISH IS NOT THE NATIVE LANGUAGE. BOTH GROUPS OF STUDENTS MUST LEARN TO READ AND WRITE STANDARD ENGLISH IF THEY ARE TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL AND ACHIEVE MAXIMUM SOCIAL MOBILITY. TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THESE YOUNGSTERS, THE DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEVELOPED A BEGINNING LANGUAGE AND READING PROGRAM, THE "MIAMI LINGUISTIC READERS" SERIES. THIS SERIES, DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR FIRST AND SECOND GRADERS, CONSISTS OF A READINESS UNIT, TWENTY ONE PUPILS' BOOKS ORGANIZED INTO FIFTEEN LEVELS, TWO "BIG BOOKS", AND A SEATWORK BOOKLET AND TEACHER'S MANUAL FOR EACH LEVEL. THE MIAMI PROGRAM REPRESENTS A CREATION OF NEW INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, AND BREAKS WITH TRADITION IN THE AREA OF ORGANIZATION AND TO SOME EXTENT IN THE AREA OF CONTENT, BUT FOLLOWS TRADITION IN ITS SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING READING. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT A CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION, DALLAS, TEXAS, MAY 4-7, 1966. (ES)

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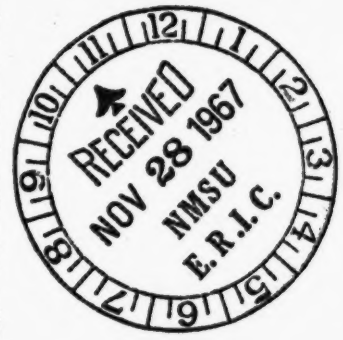

A Beginning Reading Program for the Linguistically Handicapped

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SESSION C

C4 Teaching Bilingual Children to Read

Every year in almost every state of the United States thousands of handicapped pupils enter the first grade. Their handicap is less obvious than those of the physically handicapped - the blind, the deaf, the crippled. They are linguistically handicapped. More often than not their handicap is one which exists only in the school and disappears as soon as the students return to their homes or to their neighborhoods. These students, who have functioned perfectly well for six or more years in the home environment, suddenly find that the language they speak is not the language which the school expects them to speak. Theirs is not the language of school instruction.

Let us examine these children more closely. Who are they? What are they? Very often they are the children whom the professional educator has begun to classify under the label of culturally disadvantaged, or

culturally different. In New York they are the Puerto Ricans; in the Southwest they are the Indian children, the Spanish-Americans, the Mexicans and the Mexican-Americans; in Miami they are the Cubans, and in all sections of the country they are very often Negroes or the Appalachian Whites. They are the children who don't fit into the neat middle-class, Anglo-Saxon stereotype for whom textbooks have been written and whom teachers have been trained to teach.

Defined in terms of what I have called their linguistic handicap, these children fall into two major categories which are useful classifications, though, perhaps, they reflect over simplifications. Statistically, the largest group is made up of native English-speaking children whose speech habits are non-standard. The second group is made up of children for whom English is not the native language. These are the bilinguals whose control of English may range from knowing a few words to complete fluency. Many of these children come from the lowest socio-economic levels, though many do not. Many of them come from homes in which educational aspirations are low, though many do not. Many of them are members of groups which have been the object of prejudice and discrimination, though many do not. They all, however, have one thing in common the problem they face on entering school. They must learn not only to read and write standard English, but they must also learn to speak it if they are to succeed in school and achieve maximum social mobility. Whether or not this is a fair demand is not the question, it is simply one of the facts of life in our language conscious society.

Basic Assumptions

Pertinent to an understanding of a beginning reading program for these pupils are certain basic assumptions. First, it is important to understand that the language handicapped children are not children without language. They have almost complete control of a sound system and a structure system. They control a vocabulary which may be limited, but is nevertheless adequate to describe their experiences and express their needs. Nor are they children without concepts. They have well-developed sets of concepts which have grown out of their pre-school experiences, although these experiences and resulting concepts may be quite different from those which teachers expect.

For too long these children have been doomed to experiencing unsatisfactory progress in school and to resulting academic retardation. Usually what we describe as their failures are really our failures as educators. We have said or implied that the child is just not ready for the instructional program of the school when in truth the instructional program of the school is not ready for language handicapped children. The world of Dick and Jane and the language which exists in their world has not been appropriate for the pupils we are discussing.

The Miami Program

One attempt to develop materials specifically geared to the needs of these children was begun almost three years ago in Miami, Florida. The Dade County Public Schools were faced with a crisis too big to ignore when thousands of non-English speaking pupils entered our schools. The school system with the support of a grant from the Ford Foundation, developed a beginning language and reading program, The Miami Linguistic

Readers series, designed specifically for first and second grade bilingual and language handicapped pupils.

The Miami Linguistic Readers series consists of a readiness unit, twenty one pupils' books organized into fifteen levels, two "big books", and a seatwork booklet and a teachers' manual for each level. The pupils' books correspond to the pre-primers, primers, and readers of other developmental reading series. The "big books" provide charts for inducing language practice and for focusing on reading problems. The seatwork booklets are workbooks which provide writing activities that reinforce oral expression and reading. The teachers' manuals describe activities for language, reading, and writing practice. This two year program represents a serious attempt to apply the findings of modern linguistic science to both language learning and to learning of reading, in an instructional package which also utilizes the sound pedagogical practices of good developmental reading programs.

In developing the Miami Linguistic Readers, the staff attempted to create materials which not only meets the academic needs of the pupils but which also recognize the pupil's interests, his imagination, his need to succeed, and his need to identify.

Referential Content -

The content and appearance of the pupils' books of the Miami series are somewhat unique. The books themselves resemble trade books. Each of the twenty one books tells a complete story. Each of the stories, even the first of the series which uses only eight words, has a definite plot with cross-cultural appeal. The characters in the stories, though they

are not all human in form, have very human characteristics which are easily identifiable.

In the first group of nine stories the characters are all animals-animals which are in the tradition of children's literature everywhere. They can speak, act and react like human beings. Most of the more than six thousand children who have used the Miami series have had no trouble identifying with Tiff, the puppy who has to learn to sit, to drink and dig to bury his bone. They can even identify with Biff, Tiff's father who faces frustration trying to teach his son the lessons that every good dog must learn. Oddly enough, no child, whether Cuban, Mexican-American, Negro or white, has ever worried about the race or national origin of Biff or Tiff. They also have no problem feeling compassion for Nat the Rat, who, like the child himself, sometimes does things that get him into trouble with authority. And they feel sincere relief when Nat, who has been very bad, in a later book, manages to get out of the king's dungeons, save little Tiff from drowning in a well, and thereby becomes rehabilitated and a worthwhile member of society. Nat even joins the scouts and accompanies Tiff and his friends on a camping trip.

The next four stories are all adaptations of fairy tales and folk tales. Jack and the Beanstalk, Rumpelstiltskin, and Dick Whittington and His Cat are retold. The focus of the next books is on real children in unusual situations. There is Mark who helps to save a jet airplane which he has come to think of as his own. There is Matt, a boy from the city, who befriends a stray black cat that later helps him realize his dream of becoming a newspaper boy, and there is Carlos, a migrant worker's son, who, through a combination of his own hard work and good luck, gets the

bicycle he has dreamed of. A Navajo Indian legend about a great White Horse, a story of Lincoln, a mystery and a space fantasy complete the series. The single most important criterion used in developing the series was that each story would be one which would help children develop a love for reading.

Natural Speech

The fact that a series includes interesting stories does not by itself make it a good language or reading material. Other factors must be considered. Stories which are the basis for beginning reading instructions should be written in such a way that they reflect the natural speech of children. It is possible that constructions such as "See funny father." and "See something blue." often found in primers may not present a problem for many children. However, it is certain that such constructions do nothing for the child who must learn standard English. In traditional materials the caption for a picture of a dog drinking from a bowl would be "The dog drinks". This of course does not describe the action illustrated, which is "The dog is drinking" but instead presents the notion, at least to the adult reader that the poor dog must have a drinking problem.

In the early books of the Miami series the language used is neither "primerese" nor a highly stylized literary form. It, for the most part, reflects the natural speech forms of children, what the child reads is like what the child has learned to say. As the pupil progresses through the series developing reading and language skills he builds a readiness for a more literary style.

Aural-oral Control

It has long been recognized that a child should be able to say what he is later expected to learn to read. With this sound premise in mind many educators today are advocating an extended period of purely oral work for the language handicapped pupil in general, and particularly for the non-English speaking pupil. Many people suggest that this oral program, should extend for as much as a year beyond kindergarten. Those of us connected with the Miami series feel that this approach can not be justified. It seems to be a further admission that though the child may be intellectually ready to learn to read, we are not professionally ready to teach him.

Therefore, built into the Miami series is a sequential oral language program based on linguistic principles. Through structured language practice distributed throughout the series the pupils gain control of the sounds, structures and vocabulary which he will need in order to read the materials. We believe linguistic readiness like all other aspects of reading readiness is best provided for when it is developed before each new learning task and not when it is developed globally a year or so before reading instruction begins.

Process vs. Skills

Another problem which confronts the linguistically handicapped child when he is presented traditional reading programs is his inability to master the mechanics of reading because of the continuous demands on him to verbalize about what he is learning to read. The focus in the early materials of many reading programs seems to be more on the uses to which reading is put than on the mechanics of reading.

In the Miami series an attempt is made to first guarantee that the pupil can attach sound to the symbols on the page before he is asked to interpret the stated or implied meaning of what he has read. From the very beginning, emphasis is placed on reading with meaning, but it is also placed on word attack skills, and on reading by structural units. The emphasis on mechanics, however, does not mean that thinking skills, study skills and interpretive skills are ignored. On the contrary, a complete skills program comparable to that of any other well developed developmental series is built into the materials. The choice is not between process or skills, it is merely a question of sequence. Through the use of "big books", pupils books, and activities described in the teachers manual, the pupil learns to read what is written with understanding and then is led to interpret and to integrate what he has read.

Sound-symbol correspondences

Drawing on the findings of linguistic research, the staff of the Miami project organized the series in a way which should lead the child to a conscious awareness that English writing to a large extent follows predictable patterns. The relationship between the sequence of letters on the printed page and the sequence of sounds which we utter when we read is brought into focus. Though this correspondence between sound and symbol is not a one to one correspondence, it does exist and the pupil can be taught to react automatically to the spelling patterns.

It is no wonder that children fail to see the patterns when they are confronted with much of the reading in traditional materials. For example, in one series words such as come, go, book, spot, down and to all appear in the pre-primers. In each word the letter o represents a

different sound. It would be difficult for the pupil to discover anything predictable on thesbasis of these items.

In the Miami series the sequence for introducing the writing system is based on vowel consonant spelling patterns. For example, in the first two books every word introduced with the exception of and, cat, a and the, contains only the one vowel, i, and it appears only in words in which it has the value of ĭ as in sit. In the next book more "short i" words are cumulated and "short a" words such as hat and rat are introduced. In each of the subsequent books other spelling patterns are introduced in the meaningful context of the stories. In the twenty one books all the major and most of the minor spelling patterns of English are systematically presented and dealt with.

Grammatical control

Another feature of this series which makes it appropriate for the language handicapped pupil is the controlled introduction of grammatical structures. This allows the pupil to systematically reinforce through reading language patterns of standard English which he is acquiring. The child who is struggling to learn standard English should not be confused by the too rapid introduction of new syntactical patterns. For this reason in the first two books of the series only directions, call and sentences with the present progressive (is + ing) are introduced. Level two introduces statements of identification with is, such as Nat is a rat, and Pap is a pig. Each subsequent book introduces new structures on which the pupil has had adequate previous oral practice.

Writing Experiences

In addition to the pupils books, "big books", and teachers manuals of the Miami Linguistic Readers series, there are seatwork booklets. These booklets are workbooks which provide writing experiences to reinforce the language learning which is taking place and to reinforce the child's control of the spelling patterns which have been introduced. The seatwork booklets also contribute to the skill building program which is developed in the series. Through listening, speaking, reading and then writing activities the pupil is involved in a four-fold language arts program.

Other Controls

In addition to the control of grammar and the staged introduction of the spelling patterns of English, the project staff has maintained other controls which provide for a sequence of learnings presented in small steps. In Biff and Tiff, the first book of the series, only eight items are introduced in a text of fifty-six running words. In level seven, The Magic Bean, which is the last book in the first year program, forty-nine items are introduced in the 1242 running words presented in the forty-eight page book. Average sentence length increases in a gradual progression from an average of 2.7 words per sentence in the first book to an average of eight words per sentence at the end of the first grade. The number of new items per page ranges from an average of .38 in the first book to an average of 1.1 in The Magic Bean, level 7.

Similar controls are exercised throughout the second year materials. The number of new words per book increases from 52 in Rumpelstiltskin to 120 in The Twin Mystery, the last level in the series. Similarly, the number of funning words in each 48 page book in the second year program increases from 1,352 to over 3,000 in the last level.

The total number of items introduced in the pupils' books of the series is approximately the same as would be found in the first two years of a traditional program. However, because of the staged introduction of the spelling patterns the pupil should have developed automatic responses to new items to such an extent that his word attack skills would be comparable to those of a pupil who has completed three years of a traditional material.

As a further aid to insuring success and continuous progress, a plateau story follows every 3 levels. These plateau books introduce few new learning problems. They are an easy reading stage in the sequence. In these plateaus, skill development is emphasized.

Methodology

The beginning reading program which has been described represents an attempt to create instructional materials not new methodology. It is not a new method of teaching reading. It breaks with tradition in the area of organization and to some extent in the area of content, but it follows tradition in its suggested techniques for teaching reading. We have attempted to harmonize the experience which successful second-language teachers have had with the accepted methods of teaching reading developed by reading experts during the last few decades.

It is our feeling that the well trained primary teacher should not have to be "retooled" in order to be able to teach effectively a reading program for the language handicapped. Naturally the teachers who understand the principles of linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology and related subjects, will be equipped to do an even superior job.

During the past two years over 6,000 pupils have been involved in the field try-outs of the Miami series. The evaluation of their teachers in Florida, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas and Puerto Rico where the field try-outs have been conducted, have reconfirmed our belief that the linguistically handicapped child can learn to read, and to read well, if he is provided with the kind of program that meets his needs. It is to be hoped that more material will be developed - material which will help the teachers to do their job more effectively.

The well trained primary teacher using appropriate material holds the key to the schools success of the language handicapped child. We must use that key to open the door to new horizons for a large segment of our population.

Many of the language handicapped pupils who had their first reading experience with the Miami series almost two years ago are now ready to move into third grade, reading on grade level. Though all of their school problems have not been solved, they are entering the "mainstream" of American education.